

No Social Studies Left Behind: Integrating Social Studies during the Elementary Literacy Block

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ABSTRACT

The national push to increase standardized test scores in reading and mathematics has lead to the elimination of social studies in many elementary classrooms. An old idea that educators should take a new look at is curriculum integration. Using the modes of reading as a framework, teachers can integrate social studies into the literacy block. Lessons can be created using specific instructional strategies which enable teachers to effectively cover standards in social studies and reading.

INTRODUCTION

High stakes testing mandated through the federal government as a result of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) of 2001 has placed enormous pressure on teachers to raise reading and mathematics scores. Unfortunately, the elimination of social studies from the elementary school curriculum has become a common approach to

finding more time to devote to reading and math in an effort to raise test scores. Teachers must find ways to work smarter rather than harder in order to cover all of the required standards in reading and math while not leaving out social studies. Using the literacy block, the 90 to 120 minute time period specifically dedicated to literacy instruction in elementary schools, to integrate social studies and reading is one solution to this problem.

THE PRESSURE OF HIGH STAKES TESTING AND THE ELIMINATION OF SOCIAL STUDIES

Vogler (2003) describes a hierarchy of content area importance that has developed due to mandated testing. At the top of the hierarchy sit the content areas that are tested and require passing scores: reading and mathematics. At the bottom, are the content areas not tested, including social studies. According to Savage, this is unfortunate because social studies is an essential subject and “is critical to the future of a free society” (2003, p. 201). McGuire agrees stating, “A country that depends on a well-informed citizenry that understands how democracy functions and knows something of the world beyond its own borders cannot afford to overlook the social studies” (2007, p. 620).

Eliminating social studies from the elementary curriculum is an unintended, yet serious, consequence of NCLB. Studies report that 71% of schools have reduced or eliminated non-tested subjects from the curriculum (Center for Education Policy, 2006). Even though elementary classroom teachers are required by state law to teach the social studies standards as outlined in their state curriculum guides, it has become increasingly

common for teachers to ignore these mandates and design a curriculum solely around reading and math (Hinde, 2005).

Is there a way for teachers to meet state and federal mandates regarding content to be learned in social studies while preparing students to successfully pass standardized tests in reading and mathematics? The integration of social studies into the literacy block can assist teachers in accomplishing this task. If social studies and reading are effectively integrated, teachers can teach the required content in both subject areas during the time designated for the literacy block. To successfully integrate reading and social studies, teachers must first understand exactly what is meant by the term “curriculum integration.”

CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

Curriculum integration gained popularity in the 1980s with the whole language movement. Teachers began integrating their curriculum around themes and using children’s literature as the main ingredient in thematic units because this was how teachers interpreted the whole language philosophy. Many teachers who held this philosophy believed that children would learn to read if they were exposed to good, quality children’s literature. The focus was taken off the instruction of basic reading skills (Manzo, 2007). The literature was integrated throughout subject areas which were centered around a theme. However, curriculum integration had been researched long before whole language came on the educational horizon and goes back to the work of John Dewey.

Dewey (1933) maintained that the significance of relationships between concepts is the basis for

the construction of knowledge. The integrated curriculum got its roots from the Progressive Movement of the 1930s in which Dewey's philosophy was foundational.

With the Progressive Movement came a more child-centered approach to education and an eradication of the factory-like model of most schools of that time. Dewey claimed that learning is a social process and children learn by interacting with each other. Dewey stated:

Our whole policy of compensatory education rises or falls with our ability to make school life an interesting and absorbing experience to the child. In one sense there is no such thing as compulsory education. We can have compulsory physical attendance at school; but education comes only through willing attention to and participation in school activities. It follows that the teacher must select these activities with reference to the child's interests, powers, and capabilities. In no other way can she guarantee that the child will be present. (Dewey, 1913, p. ix).

In addition, Dewey proposed that an integrated curriculum moves away from teaching isolated facts toward a more constructivist view of learning meaningful concepts. This is more like real world learning. This theoretical framework laid the foundation for the idea of an interdisciplinary, or integrated, curriculum. Shoemaker defines an integrated curriculum as:

Education that is organized in such a way that it cuts across subject-matter lines, bringing together various aspects of the curriculum into meaningful associations to focus upon broad areas of study. It views learning and teaching in a holistic way and reflects the real world, which is interactive (1991, p. 793).

In 1985 during the time of the whole language movement, Goodlad (1984) reported in his book, *A Place Called School*, that content areas such as social studies can do “double duty.” The required content in social studies can be taught at the same time and in the same lessons with skills and strategies from other content areas such as reading, thus forming an integrated curriculum as described above by Shoemaker (1991).

Unfortunately, the negative impact of whole language and the push for raising student achievement through standardized testing due to the impact of NCLB seems to have led many educators away from curriculum integration. It is time to revisit this idea so that social studies can regain its rightful place in the elementary school curriculum.

Social studies can be an integral part of the elementary curriculum if teachers understand appropriate methods to integrate their curriculum. In order to meet this challenge, they must spend time examining the social studies and reading standards and commit themselves to planning effectively.

Standards

An important tenet underlying the success of integrating social studies into the literacy block is that standards must be addressed in both content

areas. One major misunderstanding of the integrated approach is that some teachers think they are teaching social studies during reading if they simply discuss text that contains a social studies concept. Social studies instruction should be much more than simply discussing main ideas, scanning for information, and making predictions about the text. These are important reading strategies, but social studies is about focusing on democratic values and ideals that lead to the development of civic-minded citizens (McGuire, 2007).

Teachers should keep this in mind as they look at the standards they are legally responsible for teaching in reading and social studies. They need to remember that if an activity does not support the teaching of standards, it is wasting valuable instructional time.

CURRICULUM INTEGRATION AND THE LITERACY BLOCK

Social studies content and concepts can be integrated during the literacy block with careful planning by classroom teachers. Since the goal of reading is to gain meaning from print, reading is a tool for the larger goal of understanding content. In other words, the social studies content is what gives the reading process relevancy. Social studies and reading seem to be particularly well-suited for integration. Schell gives the following example explaining this relationship between social studies and reading:

For example, to best understand the Revolutionary War, students must understand the series of events that led up to the war. For this, the skill of sequencing

is essential. When students are attuned to cue words such as first, then, and finally because of a literacy lesson identifying these cue words as tools for sequencing information in a text, they can see the purpose of the literacy lesson, immediately apply the skill, and best of all, understand that the Revolutionary War erupted after a series of grievances and failed attempts to compromise (Schell, 2007, p. 150).

Many social studies and literacy standards overlap, creating an opportunity for teachers to chunk standards together into meaningful clusters within and across the two disciplines. Using the time during the literacy block to teach social studies content, while also teaching reading skills and strategies, is a way to ensure mandated standards in reading and social studies are being taught.

Dedicated teachers who are willing to exert the time, effort, and energy into integrating subject areas will see that the time each day that is to be devoted to literacy, known as the “literacy block,” is the ideal block of time to put curriculum integration into practice. This time is usually a minimum of 90 minutes and in many primary classrooms can be up to three hours. If teachers organize the time effectively this “double duty” teaching time discussed by Goodlad (1984) will assist teachers in raising student achievement in reading and social studies.

**USING THE MODES OF READING AS A
FRAMEWORK FOR CURRICULUM INTEGRATION
DURING THE LITERACY BLOCK**

In elementary classrooms, comprehensive literacy instruction takes place during the literacy block. In this type of reading instruction, teachers use different modes of reading. These modes can be used as a framework for integrating social studies and reading. The modes often include: read aloud, shared reading, guided reading, cooperative reading (also known as buddy reading, paired reading, or partner reading) and independent reading (Cooper & Kiger, 2006). When planning their literacy block, teachers decide which mode to use for a particular lesson. Cooper and Kiger (2006) describe the modes as follows:

- Read aloud - The teacher reads the selection of text aloud and discusses it with students.
- Shared reading - The teacher reads aloud a story, rhyme, or poem and invites children to join in the reading.
- Guided reading - The teacher introduces the text, the students make predictions, and as the students read the teacher guides them through the selection.
- Cooperative reading - Pairs of students take turns reading a selection, or read independently then discuss what they have read.
- Independent reading - Students read the entire selection with no support from teacher or peers. This is not self-selected reading when used as a mode of instruction.

The social studies textbook, basal reading selections consisting of social studies content, and children's picture books and chapter books related to social studies content may be used to teach social studies content during the literacy block. It is important that teachers focus on major ideas in social studies rather than simply use the social studies text as the reading material. They need to focus on the "big ideas" and principles within their social studies curriculum. Duplass explains:

For example, when planning a lesson on the American Revolution, think about what you want elementary students to get out of it.....Some suggestions are what patriotism is, whether the bravery of the Founders is an admirable quality and what its limits are, and whether the British practiced fairness in regard to the colonists. You could ask your students whether there are two sides to every story or what it would take for someone to revolt against his or her country, today (Duplass, 2004, p. 10).

Students who simply learn facts without meaningful connections will soon forget the content; big ideas help students apply concepts in other contexts and in real life.

Within the literacy block, specific instructional strategies can be used within the different modes of reading to teach children how to apply comprehension strategies before, during, and after reading. Anticipation Guides, Grand Conversations, Reciprocal Teaching, Question and Answer Relationships (QAR), and Getting the GIST are examples of instructional strategies that teachers

may choose to use during the literacy block with social studies text to integrate reading and social studies.

Read-Alouds with Anticipation Guides

The purpose of prereading strategies is to activate the prior knowledge of students and engage them in the lesson by gaining their interest in the topic (Alverman, Phelps, & Ridgeway, 2007). Anticipation Guides serve as catalysts for getting students excited and interested in a read-aloud.

By reading aloud from a content related trade book in social studies, teachers are showing students that when one is genuinely interested in a subject, they seek out books related to that field of study (Alverman, et al., 2007). Anticipation Guides (Head & Readence, 1986) can be used before reading the text aloud to assist students in activating prior knowledge about the content (Tompkins, 2004). Students are encouraged to make predictions about the text prior to hearing it read aloud.

Anticipation Guides are teacher-prepared lists of general statements about the topic that students read and discuss before the read-aloud is shared. The list can be written on a transparency, chart paper, or on individual sheets for each student. Some of the statements are accurate and some are incorrect. Students read each statement and decide whether they agree or disagree with what is stated. This piques students' interest in the topic and sets the purposes for listening to the read-aloud. After the read aloud, predictions are checked against the text that was read. This serves as an assessment tool for checking students' comprehension.

Anticipation Guides can be used during the literacy block when working on the reading skills of

making predictions and generating questions. Social studies text and content can be used to create the statements for the guide.

Example: Second grade

Culture is one of the ten themes The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) (2002) has named in its national standards. A class of second graders is studying about different cultures and their histories. The teacher has identified the social studies standard from the second grade state curriculum guide (Alabama Course of Study, Social Studies, Second Grade, 2004) for the lesson: *Identify past and present contributions of a variety of individuals who have overcome difficulties or obstacles to achieve goals.* The teacher has chosen *A Picture Book of Martin Luther King, Jr.* by David A. Adler (1989) to use as a read aloud during the literacy block to integrate social studies content. By using this book he/she is focusing on culture (African American) and covering the social studies standards in her curriculum guide by teaching the students about Martin Luther King, Jr., a famous African American who overcame great difficulties and obstacles to achieve goals.

The reading standard the teacher will be covering in this lesson as stated in her state curriculum guide (Alabama Course of Study, English Language Arts, Second Grade, 2007) is: *Exhibit increased ability to self-monitor reading by making predictions.* He/she will teach students what it means to make a prediction about what they are reading and how this leads them to becoming more aware of the information in the text.

The lesson begins with the teacher showing the students the book and reading the title. He/she then

tells them that they are going to make some predictions, or guesses, about information in the story. He/she discusses the importance of making predictions before reading any text. He/she has drawn the Anticipation Guide on a large sheet of chart paper in the front of the room and also has a handout for each student with the guide on it for them to mark. He/she introduces and explains the Anticipation Guide. He/she asks them if any of them have heard of Martin Luther King, Jr. and allows students time to discuss what they know. In doing this he/she is activating the students' prior knowledge about Martin Luther King, Jr. and getting them motivated to listen to the read aloud. He/she then reads each sentence on the Anticipation Guide and has the second graders mark *yes* if they agree with the statement and *no* if they disagree with the statement (see Figure 1).

The teacher explains to the students that after he/she reads the book aloud, they are to reread the statements on their Anticipation Guide and complete the right side of the guide based on the information they heard in the story. The text is then read aloud to the students. Following the read-aloud, all students complete the right side of their Anticipation Guide.

The teacher then reads and discusses each statement listening to students explain their answer choices. It is during this discussion that the teacher delves into the study of cultures and Martin Luther King, Jr. As he/she goes through each statement, he/she leads the students in a discussion of the importance of the ideals Martin Luther King stood for and fought for throughout his life. During the discussion of each of the statements, the teacher

returns to the text as needed to verify the answer to the statements on the Anticipation Guide.

Before Reading		Statements	After Reading	
Yes	No		Yes	No
		Martin had friends that were told they couldn't play with him because he was black.		
		Martin learned to read in school.		
		Martin entered college when he was 15 years old.		
		In college, Martin studied to become a doctor.		
		Martin's first job was in Montgomery, Alabama		
		Martin did not want to fight people who did bad things to him.		
		Martin won the Nobel Peace Prize.		
		Martin was shot in Memphis, Tennessee.		

Figure 1. Anticipation Guide for A Picture Book of Martin Luther King, Jr. by David A. Adler.

Shared Reading and Grand Conversations

Shared reading is based on the research of Don Holdaway (1979) and provides a medium for students to become involved in the process of joining in with the teacher on the reading of the text. Shared reading is an excellent means of showing students how text works. Teachers can use all types of text in a shared reading lesson such as nonfiction, picture books, short stories, newspapers, plays, poetry, chants, novels, textbooks, and periodicals (Routman, 2003).

A shared reading lesson can be done with the entire class or with small groups of students. Teachers use shared reading to involve students in reading books or texts that they cannot read independently. In primary grades, teachers typically use big books, stories, and poems written on charts for the lesson. In upper grades, class sets of books, textbooks, and transparencies containing the text can be used.

An instructional strategy usually used during a literacy block that can be used during shared reading of social studies content is the grand conversation. During a grand conversation, students engage in true dialogue and discussion about what was read. Students interpret the text and reflect on how they feel about the content (Peterson & Eeds, 1990). The talk is among the students rather than the teacher being in control of what is said; the teacher serves primarily as the facilitator of the conversation (Tompkins, 2004).

Example: Fifth grade

The American Revolution is being studied by a fifth grade class. The teacher plans a whole group shared reading of a poem entitled *The Shot Heard Round the World* from the Schoolhouse Rock series (Disney, 2007) to use during his literacy block. The social studies standard from the state curriculum guide (Alabama Course of Study, Social Studies, Fifth Grade, 2007) for this lesson is: *Identify major events of the American Revolution*. The reading standard the teacher will focus on is: *Interpret passages in print material* (Alabama Course of Study, English Language Arts, Fifth Grade, 2007).

The teacher copies the poem on a transparency. He/she introduces it to the students by

explaining to them that the title of the poem originates from Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Concord Hymn* (1837) and refers to the beginning of the American Revolution. The teacher then reads the poem aloud to the students. He/she follows this with the whole class joining in by reading it aloud with him as a shared reading.

The Shot Heard Round the World

Take your blanket, and take your son.
Report to General Washington.
We've got our rights and now it's time to
prove.

Well, they showed such determination
That they won the admiration
Of countries across the sea like France and
Spain,
Who loaned the colonies ships and guns
And put the British on the run
And the Continental Army on its feet again.

And though they lost some battles too,
The Americans swore they'd see it through,
Their raiding parties kept up, hit and run.
At Yorktown the British could not retreat,
Bottled up by Washington and the French
Fleet,
Cornwallis surrendered and finally we had
won!

From the shot heard 'round the world
To the end of the Revolution
The continental rabble took the day
And the father of our country

Beat the British there at Yorktown
And brought freedom to you and me and
the U.S.A.!

God Bless America, Let Freedom Ring!

Following the shared reading of the poem, the teacher engages students in a grand conversation focusing on the interpretation of each stanza. He asks questions such as: (1) Was the shot really heard around the world? (2) What does this really mean? (3) How did Americans put the “British” on the run? He continues asking questions in order to engage students in conversation to interpret the passages in the poem while learning content regarding the American Revolution.

Guided Reading and Question Answer Relationships

Guided reading consists of teachers working with small flexible groups of children with similar strengths and interests (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Taberski, 2000). During the small group guided sessions, teachers can integrate social studies through the use of selections from the basal reader that address social studies content, the social studies textbook, or children’s expository picture books or chapter books on the social studies content being studied, as well as text from Internet sources and news magazines and newspapers that are on a level the students can read and understand.

An instructional strategy that teachers can implement during guided reading groups is Question Answer Relationships (QAR). The QAR is “a reading strategy in which students learn to categorize comprehension questions according to

where they are likely to find the answers to these questions” (Fisher, Brozo, Frey, & Ivey, 2007, p. 76). Through the use of this strategy, teachers provide students instruction in knowing how to find information for answering questions from the text they have read. Teachers provide instruction to students in the identification of where answers can be found. Students learn to identify key words in the questions that assist them in understanding where the answer can be found: either “In the Book” or “In My Head.”

Research has proven that students in the intermediate grades are able to find if the question can be answered: (1) by looking in the book, (2) by searching in several places in the book, (3) by using the information that is in the book and combining it with their background knowledge of the topic, or (4) by using only their background knowledge. These are labeled as (1) in the book, (2) think and search, (3) author and me, and (4) on my own (Raphael & Au, 2005).

Example: Third grade

A third grade class is studying natural disasters in the United States. The reading standard (Alabama Course of Study, English Language Arts, Third Grade, 2007) for this lesson is: *Use a wide range of strategies and skills, including retelling information, using context clues, and making inferences to identify main idea, to comprehend third-grade informational and functional reading materials.* The QAR strategy is chosen for this lesson because it serves as a framework for many other comprehension strategies identified in this standard.

The social studies standard (Alabama Course of Studies, Social Studies, Third Grade, 2007) the teacher is focusing on is: *Identify ways to prepare for natural disasters in the United States*. The teacher plans for this lesson by using information from the web site *The NorthStar Preparedness Network* regarding tornados: <http://www.preparednessnetwork.org/northstar/seasonal/tornado.html>.

He/she has printed information for each child in her guided reading group to use as the text to be read for this lesson. It is entitled *Preparing for a Tornado*.

The teacher begins the lesson by explaining to the students that they will be using the QAR strategy in this lesson. He/she has spent a great amount of time in teaching this strategy prior to this lesson. The students know the two major categories of "In the Book" and "In My Head" as well as the four subcategories: "Right There," "Think and Search," "Author and Me," and "On My Own." He/she explains to the students that they will be using this strategy as they read today. Included in her explanation is the idea that, not only will the students be answering her questions, they also will tell her what kind of question it is which will assist them in knowing where they will find the answer.

He/she introduces the text by asking an "On My Own" question from the category of "In My Head." He/she asks: "How many of you have ever experienced a tornado?" By asking this question he/she is assessing the background knowledge of the students. He/she first has them identify whether this is an "In the Book" or an "In My Head" question. Once they understand that this would be an "In My Head" question, he/she listens to their

responses and follows up with another “In My Head/On My Own” question: “Do you know what to do if a tornado is coming?” He/she follows the same procedure by first having them identify the type of question that is being asked, and then listens to their answers to the question. After hearing student responses, he/she passes out the three page article from the web site and tells them that today they will be reading about tornadoes. He/she explains that the information will tell them how tornados are formed and also offers advice on how to prepare for a tornado. He/she tells the students to read the first four paragraphs of the article silently in order to answer the question: “What causes a tornado?” This is a “Think and Search” question because several causes are given in these paragraphs.

When the students have read the assigned paragraphs he/she again asks the question and listens to student responses. He/she then asks them to identify the type of question to check the students’ understanding that they had to look in several places in the text to find the answer. In doing this students had to retell information that they pulled from different places in the text. He/she continues the procedure throughout the rest of the article asking questions to check understanding of the text as well as to find if students know what sources to use to find the information (the book or their background knowledge or a combination of the two). The teacher carefully prepares the questions to ask the students throughout the guided reading lesson, ensuring that he/she creates questions from all categories and that the reading comprehension skills identified in the reading standard are addressed. As students answer the

questions, he/she engages them in a discussion of how to prepare for tornadoes thus addressing the social studies standard for this lesson.

Cooperative Reading and Reciprocal Teaching

Cooperative reading, also referred to as buddy reading, partner reading, or paired reading, involves two students taking turns reading to each other or reading silently to a specified part of the text then stopping and discussing what they read (Cooper & Kiger, 2006). In this mode of reading the students lend support to each other as they discuss the text and make predictions regarding what will take place in the next section. They continue reading and stopping to confirm predictions, summarize, and respond to what was read. An instructional strategy that works well with this mode of reading is reciprocal teaching.

Reciprocal teaching, developed by Palinscar (1986), increases student comprehension and comprehension monitoring at all grade levels (Ruddell, 2006). Palinscar, Sullivan, and Brown (1986) describe the following four skill processes that are integral to the strategy:

- 1) *Summarizing* - Students summarize what was read.
- 2) *Questioning* - Students formulate questions based on what was read.
- 3) *Clarifying* - Students discuss the text, focusing attention on what was unclear and attempt to make decisions on the reasons for the confusion. They then try to restore meaning.
- 4) *Predicting* - Students hypothesize about what they think will happen in the next part of the text.

The teacher must carefully introduce and model all four skill processes in order for students to gain independence in using them (Ruddell, 2006). Once students fully understand the processes, social studies content material can be read in cooperative reading pairs. Partners can take turns with two roles each as chunks of text are read. They stop at specified points in their reading. One partner can summarize and question; the other can clarify and predict. Another chunk of text will be read, and students will change roles.

Example: Fourth grade

Typically, fourth grade students in the United States are learning their state history. For this example, the fourth grade teacher chooses to use the textbook and partners two students during the literacy block to cooperatively read the text for the lesson.

Using the reciprocal teaching format, one student will summarize and question and the second student will clarify and predict. The social studies standard (Alabama Course of Study, Social Studies, Fourth Grade, 2007) for this lesson is: *Describe cultures, governments, and economies of prehistoric and historic Native Americans in the state.* The students will be reading a chapter of their social studies text regarding a specific group of Native Americans that lived in the state. The reading standard (Alabama Course of Study, English Language Arts, Fourth Grade, 2007) for this lesson is: *Employ study strategies with increasing facility to gain information including predicting, questioning, summarizing, and noting important details.*

The teacher has modeled the reciprocal teaching strategy in previous lessons with the students; therefore, they already understand what is meant by the terms summarize, question, clarify and predict. They have practiced the strategy with her guidance over a period of several weeks. The teacher gives each student a Four Square Reciprocal Teaching Square (Frank, 2004 as cited in Frank, Grossi, & Stanfield, 2006).

The teacher tells students that they will read the chapter in three “chunks” or sections and gives the corresponding page numbers. The students write this in their templates. As they read each section silently, they fill in the sections for their assigned roles. They then discuss what they have written. In this assignment the discussion focuses on the social studies content using the reading strategies of predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarizing. The teacher carefully monitors students as they are reading and discussing. He/she assesses how accurately they are comprehending the text and correctly using the reading strategies (see Table).

Table
Four Square Reciprocal Teaching Template

Predicting: What is your prediction for this section?	Clarifying: What words, phrases, or ideas do you need clarified?
1st section-pp. 39-41	1st section-pp. 39-41
2nd section-pp. 42-45	2nd section-pp. 42-45
3rd section-pp. 46-49	3rd section-pp. 46-49

Questioning: What questions do you have about what you read? 1st section-pp. 39-41 2nd section-pp. 42-45 3rd section-pp. 46-49	Summarizing: Write a summary for each section. Focus on “What does the author want me to know?” or “What is this about?” 1st section-pp. 39-41 2nd section-pp. 42-45 3rd section-pp. 46-49
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Adapted from Frank, C.B., Grossi, J.M., & Stanfield, D. J. (2006). *Applications of reading strategies within the classroom: Explanations, models, and teacher templates for content areas in grades 3-12*. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.

Independent Reading and the GIST strategy

The independent reading mode of reading in the literacy block does not mean sustained silent reading where students self-select a book and read with no feedback from the teacher. According to Routman, students should be monitored, assessed, and evaluated on books they are reading. In addition, students are “being taught strategies and how to apply them to problem-solve and read independently” (Routman, 2003, p. 86). The GIST strategy can be used by students during this mode of reading.

The GIST strategy (Cunningham, 1982) assists students in the skill of summarizing text. GIST stands for “Generating Interactions between Schemata and Text.” Summarizing is a strategy that requires students to draw conclusions, identify the main idea, make inferences, and select the most important ideas from a text passage (Alvermann, et al., 2007; Frank, et al., 2006). With practice

students will learn to focus on the most important ideas in their reading. Students will need guided practice prior to being able to summarize ideas independently, but with teacher guidance in the beginning, they soon will be able to do this after they have read a passage of text during independent reading.

To introduce the GIST strategy, the teacher explains that the “gist” of any text being read is the main idea, or what the text is mostly about. The students then read a passage and attempt to summarize the passage in 20 words or less. (Fran, et al., 2006). The length of the passage may determine the number of words to be used. Many teachers assign a ten word passage as students can use their fingers to count the words. This may be done a paragraph at the time, a page at a time, or at the end of the selection. When done by page or paragraph, the students continually revise their original 20 word “gist” based on the new information read.

Example: Sixth grade

A sixth grade class is studying the Great Depression and the sacrifices people had to make during that time in the United States. The teacher has assigned the novel *Nothing to Fear* by Jackie French Koller (1991) to each student in her class for independent reading. Each student has a copy of this book and reads an assigned number of pages each day during the literacy block. The social studies standard (Alabama Course of Study, Social Studies, Sixth Grade, 2007) for this particular lesson is: *Describe the effect of the Great Depression on the people of the United States*. The reading standard (Alabama Course of Study, English Language Arts, Sixth Grade, 2007) that will

be the focus for this lesson is: *Interpret literary elements and devices, including main idea.*

The teacher introduces the book by telling students that the story takes place in New York City during the Great Depression of the 1930's. He/she tells them that it is about a 13 year old boy named Danny who makes money by shining shoes and whose mother earns money doing laundry. His father has to leave them to go find work and they live in a terrible state of poverty.

The teacher leads the class in a discussion of how hard times were during the Great Depression and what people had to go through during this time to survive. He/she tells the students that they are going to read the first chapter in the book independently.

When all students are finished reading the chapter, the teacher then discusses the events of the chapter with the students. He/she does this through the GIST strategy. He/she gives them all a copy of the GIST template and has an overhead transparency he/she uses for modeling (see Figure 2).

Text: _____		
Describe the following from the text read:		
Who:		
What:		
When:		
Where:		
How:		
Write a 20 word GIST from the information above:		
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Figure 2. Gist.

As they discuss each story element (the who, what, when, where, why, and how), he/she teaches the social studies content through the discussion of the chapter. Since students have practiced writing summaries before, he/she asks them to use what they have written in the template to write a 20 word “GIST” or summary of the chapter.

CONCLUSION

Integration is an old idea that is getting a fresh look. It may provide a solution to the problem that schools are experiencing across the nation in regard to meeting state and national standards and providing a balanced curriculum. In *A Place Called*

School, Goodlad (1984) says that we can have our “curricular cake and eat it too” by integrating subjects.

To prevent social studies from being left behind, teachers and policy makers should consider integrating social studies into the literacy block.

By using the rich fund of knowledge about effective integration to guide their preparation, teachers can present elementary level integrated social studies lessons that are engaging and powerful and meet state and federal mandates without taking classroom time away from other subject areas (Hinde, 2005, p. 109).

The bottom line to a successful integrated curriculum, as well as a traditional one, is that a skilled teacher is needed. The teacher is truly the decisive element in the classroom. We need teachers who are flexible and willing to adapt to our changing world and subsequent needs. We need teachers who are willing to try innovative approaches and think outside the box for creative solutions to problems facing our schools. We need teachers who can teach and make decisions without relying on the textbook. This sort of teacher is one who will truly reap the benefits of integrating social studies into the literacy block, thus ensuring that social studies is not left behind.

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